News From Somewhere

By Project Alphistia
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One year anniversary

In July of 2025, I started this newsletter to document what I have been working on for Project Alphistia. In the late 1800s, the famous writer and artist William Morris wrote a novel called “News from Nowhere”, about a future British society that had evolved into non-industrial socialism. I decided to call my newsletter “News from Somewhere” as a tribute to Morris’s great work.

Since then, I have published 14 issues altogether, with close to 60 pages of my thoughts and ideas, travels, and updates on how my beloved cat Pushkin is doing. The response from my readers has been really encouraging. I’ve gotten many thumbs up and comments. It’s all been appreciated, so thank you very much!

I hope to continue with “News from Somewhere” for as long as I can. So far, so good 🙂

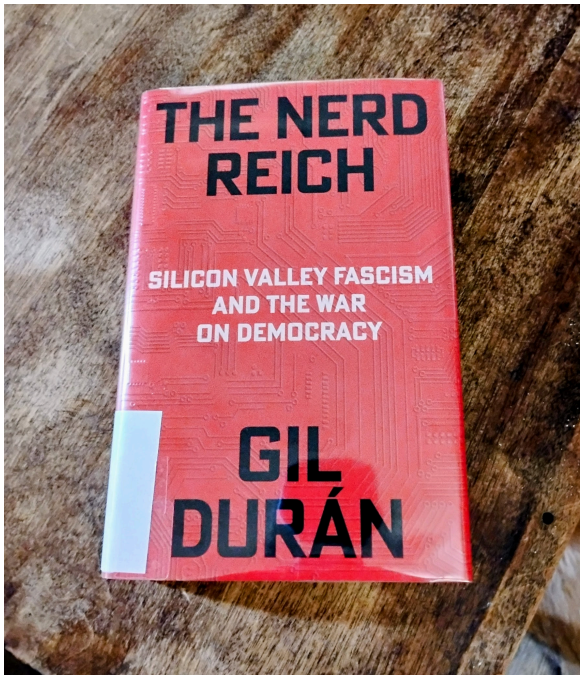
Correction

Two issues ago (May, 2026 Volume 2, Number 4) I made a mistake when referring to the community forming in Alton, IL. I called it CATGO throughout the article, which is actually called CATCO, for Cultural, Agronomic, and Technological Community. “News from Somewhere” regrets the error.

Nerd Reich Book Is Published

Gil Duran’s expose of the techbro far-right movement to destroy democracy came out on August 18. Duran calls these extremists “The Nerd Reich”, because it is becoming more and more obvious that they are fascists. He has been researching the efforts of Peter Thiel, Curtis Yarvin, Balaji Srinivasan, Marc Andreessen, Musk, and others who hope to remake society with themselves and their proxies as leaders of non-democratic political entities called “network states”. Their real goal is dictatorship and serfdom.

I signed up to borrow a copy from my local public library, and within days I got a notice that it was available for pick-up. Over the next week I’ll read it closely, and in the next newsletter, I’m sure I’ll have some thoughts to share.



Pushkin

My cat Pushkin is thriving this summer, and that is just wonderful. He eats largely a protein diet: non-grain based kibble (duck

and chicken mostly) and seafood and grilled beef pates. This has resulted in a rich, soft coat, healthy eyes, and a general disposition that is alert and contented. He takes a “magic pill” once a day ground up in his main pate meal, and this controls his blood sugar. Last year he developed diabetes, and the vet put him on a new pill that means Pushkin doesn’t need insulin shots. Taking care of Pushkin’s health is expensive (as it is for my health too!) but it’s working, and that little boy is worth every penny.

It was 8 years ago this coming Labor Day weekend that I found him in the parking lot of the apartment house where I used to live. He was flea-bitten, skinny, and very desperate. He introduced himself to me and it only took a minute for me to realize I needed to give him a home. NO REGRETS!

(Pushkin needs sunglasses)

Hobbitenango

Now and then I “go” to The Shire online and look at art and maps of Tolkien’s invented “homeland”. There are lots of imagined art and descriptions on the web, some of them quite descriptive and beautifully depicted. There are even tourist sites based on Tolkien’s imaginarium, such as the former filming sites in New Zealand where “Lord of the Rings” was made in the early 2000s.

I recently came across a holiday village deep in the rainforests of Guatemala. It’s called “Hobbitenango”. Some true devotees of The Master have created a very pleasant destination with architecture inspired by Hobbitton.

There’s a nice website about it at: https://www.hobbitenango.com/en/

I’m not sure I’ll ever make it down there at my age…but for intrepid Tolkien fans, it might be just the thing. Although it is a bit remote, it’s not quite so hard to get to (for most anyway) as New Zealand is. And the scenery seems SPECTACULAR, and the design is not kitsch. Please send a postcard if you go! 🙂

(the beautiful view of Hobbitenango)

Life Expectancy

The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) consists of 38 of the most advanced countries in the world. For life expectancy, the United States ranks 30th out of 38th, an astonishing number.

There are three primary reasons for this: 1) the US does not have universal access to healthcare. It is rationed by cost, socio-economic status, race, and location 2) the US has the most expensive health care costs in the world, and even with insurance, Americans pay more for poorer outcomes than any other advanced country. 3) Americans have the highest obesity rate of any OECD country, due largely to a very bad diet and for so many, a lack of regular exercise.

The poorest country of Europe is Albania. Its overall life expectancy in 2024 was 80. For males it was 82 and 7 months, for females it was 86.

Most consider the US the richest country in the world. It is by GNP but not by GNP per capita, and its inequality in income is very high.The overall life expectancy in the US was 79 in 2024, for males it was 76 and 5 months, for females it was 81 and 4 months. Albanian clearly has higher numbers…

Cuba is ranked near the bottom economically in the Western Hemisphere. Its overall life expectancy is 78, its male life expectancy is 76, and its female life expectancy is 81. So, an extremely poor country that is an American neighbor with a political/economic system the US loathes, has almost equal life expectancy stats.

My home state Kentucky (where I lived until I was 18) is one of the least developed parts of the US. Its overall life expectancy was 73 and 6 months (5 and a half years less than the American overall stat). For males it was only 69, 10 years less than the overall US number! That is an astonishing figure!! For females it is 78, about 3.5 than the US female stat. People in Albania live far longer than the average Kentuckian. Quite a shocker.

The most advanced economy in Europe is Switzerland. Overall life expectancy there is 84 and 3 months, 82 and 7 months for males, and 86 and 2 months for females. The average Swiss person lives 10 years longer than the average Kentuckian and a bit more than 5 years longer than the average American.

Overall life expectancy in other OECD advanced countries include:

Canada-82(3 years longer than the US)
Costa Rica-81 (2 years longer than US)
Netherlands 82 (3 years longer)
Germany-81 (2 years longer)
Sweden - 84 (5 years longer)
Ireland - 83 (4 years longer)
United Kingdom (2 years longer)

These numbers are shameful for the United States. Sadly though, this is barely a political issue, Neither party really cares, because they are united in believing in American Exceptionalism…that the US is the best at everything, in spite of that not being true for a great many things. Most Americans don't know they are being cheated. (stats source: The World Bank.)

Postage Stamp Artist

Donald Evans was an outsider artist who drew by hand beautiful postage stamps. He died in 1977 at the age of 31, a very talented artist's career cut short. He died in a house fire in Amsterdam.

He was gay, but in the late 1970s that was only beginning to be accepted as a normal part of life. He was open to his friends, particularly in Holland, where he tried to live on a tourist visa for as long as he could (he would stay for months, then go back to work in New York City, then move right back to Amsterdam as soon as he could).

He apparently made more than 5000 different stamps, decorating envelopes and postcards, which he would give or send to friends. He had a number of exhibitions, but it was not a lucrative profession, more a hobby that gave him great satisfaction as an artist. When he needed to work, he'd take temp jobs in New York as an architect's sketch assistant.

Evans invented more than a dozen imaginary countries and would draw figures of "history", native birds and flowers, and his drafting skills (and eyesight) were so good he could draw on his one inch square postage stamps in incredible detail. He would organize his collection in beautiful stamp albums. And somehow these survived the fire that ended his life.

A beautiful book about him and his art was published in 1980. It's long out of print and difficult to find, but the wonderful library at the University of Illinois here where I live does have a copy. 🙂

(every country must have an Elvis stamp!)

I've drawn a few Alphistian postage stamps through the years. About 15 years ago I had a really good artisan in Germany design a high quality sheet for me. I've included several of my own hand drawn stamps here in this article as well.

(an Alphistian airmail stamp from 1996)

Comments always welcome:
alphistia@gmail.com